

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs C Hamilton
Headteacher
Holy Family Catholic Primary School
Arncliffe Road
Halewood
Liverpool
L25 9PA

Dear Mrs Hamilton

Ofsted 2006-07 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 28 June 2007 to look at work in mathematics. As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject, mathematics, was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Children's mathematical development on entry to the school is average for their age. Language and communication skills are weaker. Pupils make steady progress in mathematics in Key Stage 1 because provision focuses sharply on the development of independent learning skills and self-confidence. Standards in mathematics are average in Year 2. Pupils' knowledge, understanding and methods of working at this stage provide a good platform for learning in subsequent years.

- Pupils make consistently good progress in Key Stage 2. All pupils are challenged well, at the appropriate level. Standards are above average in Year 6, which represents a significant improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils enjoy teasing out answers with their partners and say that they feel a sense of achievement when they complete difficult work by themselves. Another factor in pupils' good achievement is their drive and personal ambition to do well.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good.

- Teachers have high expectations. Some excellent teaching was observed in Year 6. Teaching assistants provide valuable support for pupils who need additional help and reassurance.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge and expertise well. They foster good relationships so pupils are confident to ask questions and to learn from each other. The lively buzz of activity in all the lessons observed was indicative of pupils' enjoyment when given the freedom to try things out for themselves.
- The marking of pupils' work has improved since the previous inspection. Pupils are now much better informed about the quality of their work and how they can develop it further. There are still some inconsistencies however. The very best marking includes questions from the teacher that challenge pupils' thinking one step further.
- Teachers make very good use of information from assessment procedures to provide work that constantly challenges pupils at a level suited to their ability.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is designed thoughtfully. Its flexibility enables the school to respond quickly to national initiatives and to pupils' specific needs. For example, it has been adapted successfully to cater for the two mixed-age classes in Key Stage 2 and for the significant number of pupils joining the school this year from a neighbouring one that has closed.
- Skills in mathematics are developed through activities and materials that relate directly to pupils' interests and range of experiences. This arouses their enthusiasm for the subject because they see immediately the relevance of the work to everyday life and to their future.
- Pupils respond particularly well in lessons that have plenty of 'hands on' activities and where there is a strong visual content in the introductory part of the session.
- The emphasis and regular practice of mental mathematics underpins pupils' work well in other strands of the subject.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- The subject leader's work is exemplary. It is analytical and far-sighted. It influences the work of staff in the school and in the local authority, and is a significant factor in the rising standards and pupils' enjoyment of the subject.
- Teachers are adaptable to change. Self-critical and accurate evaluation leads to a constant search for ways to improve further, for example, by trialling out new techniques to determine which are most effective in moving pupils on.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Teachers' enthusiasm for the subject is infectious. It helps pupils to gain in confidence and to overcome the initial difficulties some have when explaining themselves using mathematical language. Problems written in words are integral to the work in all classes. Pupils tackle them with growing confidence and success. There is good evidence of open-ended investigative work being used to stimulate critical and lateral thinking but this aspect of the subject is not yet embedded firmly in the whole-school curriculum.

Inclusion

The school's ethos is underpinned by the way that everyone is valued for their contribution. The school provides well for pupils of all abilities and backgrounds. Pupils' talents and potential are nurtured to fruition. Parents and carers are provided with good opportunities to become involved in their children's learning, which many do. Pupils of all abilities achieve equally well and are ambitious for success.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring the consistency of marking so that pupils know exactly what to do to improve their work further
- making investigative work an integral part of the curriculum in mathematics in all classes.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

June Tracey
Additional Inspector